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MORE AND BETTER USES FOR COTTON

A talk broadcast by Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, in the Department of Agriculture portion of the National Farm and Home Hour Tuesday, August 6, 1940, over stations associated with the Blue Network of the National Broadcasting Company.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

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KADDERLY:

Now for our regular Tuesday report from the Bureau of Home Economics... as Miss Ruth O'Brien tells us about some of the things this Bureau is doing to discover more and better uses for cotton... as one of the forms of Government assistance in putting to use in our own country new large supplies of raw cotton.

Miss O'Brien is chief of the Division of Textiles and Clothing in the Bureau of Home Economics....the division that is doing this research work.

A little while ago Mr. Moore of Milam County, Texas, said, "you can't eat cotton". But, you can do a lot of other things with it, as Miss O'Brien will point out.

O'BRIEN:

Thank you, Mr. Kadderly. I am always glad of an opportunity to say a word on cotton utilization. It is really surprising how many things are and can be made of cotton if we put our minds to it.

For instance, do we all realize that cotton makes very good upholstery fabrics for chairs and sofas? Over at the Bureau, we just finished analyzing a lot of these materials. Of course, if they are to be satisfactory, all such fabrics, whether of cotton or some other fiber, should be fast to light and to cleaning. Nothing is so distressing to a homemaker as to spend money and time on covering a chair or making curtains for a lot of windows, only to find after a few weeks they have faded in ugly streaks. And if they are made of cotton, cotton is likely to get the blame -- very unjustly.

The fault in such cases is not with the cotton but with the dye. The way to avoid disasters of that kind is to buy only fabrics labeled as color permanent-- fast both to light and to cleaning. So, getting satisfactory cotton goods, just as any other kind, depends a lot on careful buying.

The selection of blankets is another place where intelligent buying can be linked up with the satisfactory use of cotton. For example, considering the price and the wear it must withstand, often the very best buy is a blanket with a good strong cotton warp and heavy wool filling which permits sufficient nap to be raised to give adequate warmth. Such a blanket has the strength needed to withstand the wear and tear husky boys may give it in some of these bed-time scuffles. It washes well and at the same time it is warm.

But the trick is to be sure you know how much wool is in the blanket, the weight, the size, and if possible, the breaking strength. Such facts are now found on the labels of some blankets and are the only means of knowing definitely whether or not your purchase is a wise one.

The Bureau has tried to help by publishing a bulletin pointing out the things to watch out for when buying not only blankets, but also sheets and towels. If every family in the United States had a satisfactory supply of these household items, the cotton farmers would have less to worry about.

Well this is by no means an account of all the research work that we are doing with cotton. I haven't mentioned the cotton stockings that we have designed; nor the finishes for cotton fabrics that we have developed to protect the fabric from mildew; and the studies we have made of cotton fabrics used for men's shirts.

I am reminded of that shirt study as I look at these good-looking shirts sported by the gentlemen here in the studio. One thing we discovered is the way the new uses of old-time names of fabrics are making trouble for purchasers of these cotton fabrics. For example, there is that old stand-by, broadcloth, used not only for shirts, but also for women's dresses and children's clothes. But do we all know that the name "broadcloth" is now also being applied to fabrics quite different from those most of us have in mind when we ask for that fabric? The broadcloth we think of is that fine material with something like 156 warp yarns per inch. But we find that since broadcloth has become so popular, coarse fabrics with as few as 80 warp yarns per inch are being sold under that name.

This is just one example of the wrong use of fabric names which tends to bring criticism on cotton. The Bureau is working with the American Society for Testing Materials and other agencies in an effort to obtain agreements on definitions for fabric names so as to prevent difficulties of this kind.

In closing, just let me say that, as we have worked with cotton in our laboratories I have become more and more impressed with how lucky we are in America to have such a useful fiber right at our door-step. It is merely up to us to make use of it.

KADDERLY:

(Offered these bulletins: "Guides for buying sheets, blankets, bath towels." "Cotton shirts for men and boys.")